

Cabinet – 11 December 2013

Walsall Gala Baths Refurbishment

Portfolio: Councillor A Harris – Leisure & Culture

Service: Leisure & Culture

Related portfolios: None

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary

The current draft capital programme is balanced, therefore this investment would require additional unfunded borrowing or removal of an existing scheme from the currently proposed 2014/15 programme. Borrowing costs are as set out in the report.

The report outlines the refurbishment options for the Gala Baths following the resolution from Council on 23 September 2013 to investigate a scheme to a capital cost of £1million. The proposed development (with indicative cost) comprises:

- A fixed boom in the Main Pool to create a 25m “short course” pool, and upgrading pool plant (£150,000)
- Reduce the depth of the Main Pool (£20,000)
- Changing Village and install sauna & steam room (£370,000)
- Fitness Suite extension (£150,000)
- Main Pool Flume (£110,000)
- Brine Pool Water Features (£60,000)
- Reception remodelling (£100,000)
- Decoration and signage (£40,000)

2. Recommendation

Cabinet considers what level, if any, of investment should be made to the Gala Baths and how this investment should be funded, and communicates this to full council.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 A 2,000 signature petition was presented to Council on 23 September 2013 stating: *"We the undersigned do not wish to see the closure of Walsall Gala Baths as we believe that it is important to have swimming facilities in the town centre. Especially and in particular, we do not wish to lose the only BRINE pool that is centrally located, well used and much appreciated for its medical benefits to many of its users."*
- 3.2 Council considered this petition at its meeting on 23 September 2013 and in response Council passed the following resolution: *"That this Council calls for a further and more detailed report for Cabinet and Council consideration, using a cost/benefit analysis approach as to how this Council at a relatively modest investment cost (of around £1m), might ensure a further 10 year lease of life for this town centre facility by re-modelling the Gala Pool, retaining the Brine Pool and therefore making it likely for user numbers to rise and unit costs to fall correspondingly."*
- 3.3 Officers have subsequently consulted with a range of organisations to consider development options, with the aspiration to:
- a) Update the facility – both fabric and aesthetics
 - b) Maximise revenue and sustainability
 - c) Extend the life of the facility
 - d) Reflect the needs of residents as identified through the Working Smarter Sport & Leisure Review

Members will be aware that there is currently a strategic review of the Sport and Leisure Service underway, including proposals for the complete replacement of Oak Park and Bloxwich Leisure Centres. Consideration should be given as to whether any decision on investment in Gala Baths be made as part of this wider review.

- 3.4 Based on an investment cost in the region of £1million, the following investments are considered the most effective way of delivering the above aspirations:

i) Partition Main Pool & Pool Plant Upgrade

Description: The installation of a fixed bulkhead at the shallow end of the main pool to create a 25m x 13.5m "short-course" competition pool. A 13.5m x 6m teaching pool will be created with independent water circulation to allow warmer water in this pool

Benefit: The current 33m pool is now a non-standard size and due to its size and water volume is kept relatively cold (27°C). The partition will allow for 25m swimming and essentially create an additional pool that with warmer (31°C) and shallower water will be ideally suited for swimming lessons. The associated pool plant upgrade (re-line & refresh filters & chemical dosing) is essential to secure long-term operation as the bulk of the plant is the original 1961 installation.

Cost: £150,000 (estimated)

ii) Main Pool Infill

Description: To infill the deep end of the Main Pool to reduce the depth from 4.3m to 2m.

Benefit: The Main Pool is extremely deep to accommodate the 7m diving stage – which is almost never used. By taking the diving boards permanently out-of-use the depth could be reduced to 2m, a depth that will accommodate most other pool uses. The reduction in depth would reduce the volume of water by approximately 40%, which would lead to a corresponding reduction in gas usage for heating, electricity for water circulation and chemical usage for disinfection, as well as using less water. The saving for this would be in the region of £5,000 per annum.

Cost: £20,000 (estimated)

iii) Changing Village & Thermal Suite

Description: Replacement of the current male and female changing with a unisex changing village. Incorporated in the changing village will be a thermal suite comprising sauna and steam rooms.

Benefit: The current changing provision is poor, with low ceilings, no natural light and re-cast concrete cubicles; in addition the single sex configuration causes supervision problems and inhibits access by families. Industry-wide changing provision is the largest cause of customer complaint. Very positive comments were made when the Brine pool changing space was improved in 2009/10. The installation of a sauna and steam room to create a thermal suite would also provide an attractive additional facility that would help add value to membership packages and would be particularly appealing to older Brine Pool users

Cost: £370,000 (estimated)

iv) Fitness Suite Extension

Description: Extending the existing first floor fitness suite onto the adjacent flat roof and small pool balcony. This would create a space in the region of 230m² which would accommodate 50 pieces of fitness equipment.

Benefit: A latent demand study into Gala Baths' health & fitness catchment has indicated a latent demand for a further 400 members. This supports the extension of the gym from 30 stations with 630 members to 50 stations with potentially 1,000 member. This uplift in members is estimated to generate additional annual income of approximately £51,000.

Cost: £150,000 (estimated)

v) Main Pool Flume

Description: The installation of a closed-tube flume running from the existing spectator seating into a separate catch-pool on the main pool surround.

Benefit: The flume will provide an additional attraction for older children and young adults and will complement the provision for younger children in the Brine Pool (below). By having the slide discharge into a catch pool, its operation will have no impact on the use of the main pool.

Cost: £110,000 (estimated)

vi) Brine Pool Water Features

Description: Installing a variety of interactive water play features above and to the sides of the Brine Pool. These would include tipping-buckets, showers, water wheels and interactive play panels.

Benefit: These interactive water features will provide a significant refresh for the brine pool and will be ideally suited to the young children and disabled people currently using the Brine Pool. The features will only operate during designated sessions to avoid disrupting the Brine Pool's older users.

Cost: £60,000 (estimated)

vii) Reception Remodelling

Description: Significant remodelling of the reception area to create a more welcoming environment and a noticeable difference for existing users. This would include relocating the reception desk, self-service terminals and the creation of a (self-service) coffee lounge.

Benefit: The current Gala Baths reception area immediately reveals the age of the facility. In addition the layout inhibits customer flow and customers frequently queue out of the front doors during only moderately popular sessions. The remodel will improve customer flow, staff interaction and facilitate self-service for pre-paid members.

Cost: £100,000 (estimated)

viii) Decoration and Signage

Description: The provision of new internal and external signage and re-branding alongside targeted re-decoration of areas not otherwise affected by the refurbishment.

Benefit: To improve profile and customer flow and to integrate the “new” and old elements of the building.

Cost: £40,000 (estimated)

4. Council priorities

The proposals would impact upon the Council priorities as follows:

Improving health, including wellbeing and independence for older people

The positive health impact of improved physical activity is well evidenced and unambiguous. Walsall has a major problem with physical inactivity, with one of the lowest levels of physical activity in the country and the highest per-capital cost of inactivity in the midlands (west and east).

Local research has clearly indicated that the activities most likely to get the sedentary population active are swimming and fitness and a major barrier to participation is the quality of Walsall's existing facilities. Therefore the proposals are likely to have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents.

Improving learning and life children for children and young people

Swimming is a key life skill as reflected in the success of the free-swimming for under-16s – which has generated 50,000 attendances across the 4 leisure centres in the first 6 months of this year. The proposals will have a positive impact on children and young people. Several of the proposals (Brine Pool water features, Main Pool flume) will actively encourage children to engage and enhance the visit experience.

5. Risk management

The proposals are based on an existing operation and as such most risk factors are already known and managed – existing risk management processes can be extended to include the new facilities.

6. Financial implications

The proposals have been tailored to fit the Council resolution to investigate an investment of approximately £1million. The capital costs above are based on estimates / quotations from suppliers and have yet to be subject to a procurement process that is compliant with legislative requirements and the Council's Contract Rules.

The existing Gala Baths complex currently generates approximately £350,000 income per year. The proposals have been targeted to improve the overall experience of visiting Gala Baths and as such should have a positive impact on the income levels. Based on the proposals outlined above it is projected that the improvements will deliver approximately £100,000 additional net income (please see **Appendix A**).

The cost to the Council of the Gala Baths complex, net of income, is approximately £300,000 for Sport and Leisure Services and a further £166,000 for Property Services. Although this investment should reduce this amount, Gala Baths will almost certainly still require a substantial revenue subsidy throughout its operation.

If the £100,000 income uplift is used to finance the £1million through prudential borrowing, the payback period will be 12 years. If the £100,000 is used for this purpose it cannot be used to mitigate the Council subsidy to the facility, which will remain at £466,000 per year. Operating the Gala Baths for this 12 year period will therefore cost the Council £5.6million.

The future of Gala Baths needs to be seen in the wider strategic context of the Sport & Leisure Service. Although these proposals will make a substantial improvement to the appearance and functionality of the centre, Gala Baths was built in 1961. The operation of a facility more than 50-years old will always involve a degree of compromise; it is unrealistic to expect a facility of this age to achieve the standards of cost efficiency and quality delivered by modern facilities.

The redecoration costs within element viii cannot be considered capital expenditure – a one-off revenue allocation may be required to fund this work.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Whilst there is no statutory obligation on the council to provide leisure centres per se, there remains an obligation to provide adequate recreational, social and physical facilities for school purposes.
- 7.2 Contracts for works will need to be procured following a process that is compliant with both the Council's Contract Rules and any legislative requirements.

8. Property implications

Property Services have been engaged as part of the development process.

A ninth proposal, which would exceed the £1million guideline cost would be the installation of a moveable floor into the new teaching pool as follows:

viii) Main Pool Moveable Floor

Description: The provision of a retrofit moving floor in the 13.5m x 6m teaching pool allowing the depth of the pool to vary by any increment.

Benefit: Such a piece of equipment provides much greater flexibility of the available water as the depth of the pool across its whole area can be set to different depths depending on the intended use of the pool. This will allow it to be used as a pool cover at night (to save heat loss and energy costs) but also enables mother & toddler sessions, aquafit classes, disability groups, older people and those less confident with deeper water to make use of the space.

Cost: £250,000 (estimated)

9. Health and wellbeing implications

The positive health impact of improved physical activity is well evidenced and unambiguous. Walsall has a major problem with physical inactivity, with levels of physical activity, consistently and stubbornly among the worst in the country. Recent statistics have indicated that Walsall has the highest per-capita cost of inactivity in the midlands (west and east).

Local research has clearly indicated that the activities most likely to get the sedentary population active are swimming and fitness and a major barrier to participation is the quality of Walsall's existing facilities. Therefore the proposals are likely to have a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents. The proposals are projected to increase the attendances to Gala Baths by in excess of 25%.

10 Staffing implications

None.

11. Equality implications

The proposals will significantly improve the attractiveness and accessibility of the Gala Baths – in particular the changing room and Brine Pool improvement proposals.

Reducing the overall depth of the water from 4.3m to just 2m in the Main Pool will make more of the available water space usable for recreational swimming.

12. Consultation

The Amateur Swimming Association has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals – in particular the partitioning and re-profiling of the main pool. In addition the following commercial providers have been consulted with regard the cost and viability of the refurbishment options:

- Alliance Leisure
- Pulse Fitness
- Hippo Leisure
- Sterling Hydrotech

Sport England is also aware of the proposal as part of the on-going work with the "Iconic" grant award scheme to replace the leisure centres at Oak Park and Bloxwich.

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2 December 2013

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2 December 2013

Appendix A – Projected increased income & attendance from proposals

Income	Improvement	Uplift Factor	Current income	Projected income	Uplift	Revenue Costs	Net income uplift	Current Attendance	Increased Attendance
Fitness income	Increase in size & range of equipment from 30 to 50 stations	60%	£85,000	£136,000	£51,000	£0	£51,000	26,000	15,600
Swimming lesson income	Partitioning of main pool effectively creates a second teaching area	50%	£45,000	£67,500	£22,500	£15,000	£7,500	11,000	5,500
Other Swimming income	General improvements (changing & reception), plus water features should deliver an uplift in attendance.	20%	£195,000	£234,000	£39,000	£0	£39,000	200,000	40,000
Secondary sales	As above	20%	£25,000	£30,000	£5,000	£2,500	£2,500		
			£350,000	£467,500	£117,500	£17,500	£100,000	237,000	61,100